



**DISABLED
SURFERS
ASSOCIATION OF
AUSTRALIA Inc.**

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

DISABILITY CARE AND SUPPORT INQUIRY 2011

DSAA SUBMISSION

PO Box 345 The Entrance NSW Australia 2261

Surfers helping Surfers
www.disabledsurfers.org

DISABILITY CARE AND SUPPORT INQUIRY

Productivity Commission

15th June 2011

GPO Box 1428

Canberra City

ACT 2601

The Disabled Surfers Association of Australia Inc. applauds any initiative that attempts to improve the quality of life for our disabled community, their families and carers throughout Australia. Unfortunately through our experiences over two and a half decades of providing our speciality service, we have little faith in the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020, as it will be found to be too hard and or complicated, will fall apart and never come to fruition as those strategies before it.

As one of the few voluntary hands on providers who cater for each of the disabilities, from Asthmatics to Amputees, Cerebral Palsy to Spina bifida, Autism to Down syndrome, Brain injury to Visual impairment and Paraplegia to breathing assisted Quadriplegia, we understand the requirements of each individual disability in everyday life.

Underlying most government strategies on disability and inclusive participation, it relies on appropriate funding and once that funding erodes the service ceases. The NDS certainly has the words, glossy brochures and general intent to improve the lives of people with disabilities by improving opportunities and access.

The fundamental flaw in the strategy is its scope, from severe to profound or catastrophic injuries. Once again this strategy is already showing the cracks that so many people fall between when living with a disability.

The strategy states that it is non discriminatory, yet the scope alone raises legal issues that all authorities dealing with equal rights for the disabled may find disturbing. It raises the terminologies of "a more inclusive community", "increased participation" and that "not all people with disabilities are alike".

A more inclusive community would accept everyone with a disability, not just the severe or profound. Increased participation when analysed, eventually relies on voluntary service providers at the coal face to supply services which all levels of government have either failed with or have no understanding of what is needed. Most of these voluntary service providers have also fallen between the bureaucratic cracks within the system. Increased participation is generally fulfilled by these speciality voluntary service providers who increasingly are been shut out by the system itself.

Governments' have a major responsibility to improve the lives of those living with all disabilities, yet generally it is organisations such as Riding for the Disabled, Sailability, Breakaway and the Disabled Surfers, etc., who have been left to fend for themselves, although do more to change the lives of many within our communities.

2.

The Strategy itself raises the issue of respite, range of community participation and day programs available, yet most have little support from any level of government and in many cases are increasingly having bureaucratic barriers placed before them.

Participation is the Disabled Surfers Association of Australia's speciality. Inclusiveness, acceptance and access are a priority in our advocacy. We lead the world in our speciality service, yet are unable to have the Federal Government recognise our service as a National Sporting Organisation for the Disabled (N.S.O.D.) as we do not compete.

Rules set by the Australian Sports Commission that the DSA need to run regional, state and national competitions to be recognised, have been raised with consecutive Sports and Disability ministers over many years. We are expected to go under the guidance of the peak Surfing authority, Surfing Australia, who have falsely signed an inclusive agreement with the federal government that they will endeavour to cater for the disabled.

Like most sports in Australia, they have been forced to sign agreements that they have very little chance of fulfilling or run the risk of funding being withdrawn. Originally Project Connect and now known as Sports Connect, it is nothing more than cherry picking those who are the simplest to cater for. Tokenistic bureaucratic box ticking that does very little to include and increase participation.

The DSA have raised this issue with the Disability Discrimination Commissioner, only to be told that his chosen sport of Blind Cricket is catering for the disabled, yet when challenged on how many other disabilities were represented in his team, our meeting was terminated. We have lobbied most peak sporting organisations throughout Australia and most have admitted that the program is a total nightmare. Once reaching the "Gold" level within Sport Connect, it is expected that the peak body is to totally fund their Disability program, with the Federal Government shirking their responsibility to the disabled citizens of Australia once again.

The DSA have aggressively pursued the rights of our many hundreds of disabled members and tens of thousands of volunteers throughout our fourteen branches around Australia and New Zealand on the National Disability Strategy and many other government strategies. We attended one of the first workshops on this strategy in Sydney and submitted a report (19th November 2008), yet were forgotten when it came to the strategy itself and were not notified that it was out for comment.

We have continually contacted consecutive ministers and had this issue raised in a Parliamentary standing estimates committee (Tuesday 31st October 2006). Senior Advisor on Disabilities for the Prime Minister, Chris Carlile is very aware of the work we have put in for our inclusion program, including our meetings in Canberra with several ministers over many years. Submissions to the Crawford report, the National Disability Agreement, Independent Expert Panel, and attending an assortment of workshops and seminars relating to these issues with our views have falling on deaf ears.

If the Productivity Commission ever needed an example of falling between the bureaucratic cracks of government strategies and policies, the DSA is a prime example.

3.

The Disabled Surfers Association of Australia Inc. is the driving force for the World's first Disability Tourism Precinct projects in Sydney and on the Central Coast of NSW. We have projects on disability access to identified beaches and infrastructure improvement programs for disability toilets with the introduction of the Master Locksmiths Association Key (M.L.A.K.) system.

The DSA recently wrote once again to another minister, Senator the Hon Jan McLucas, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers, wishing to raise the MLAK system in Australia and other issues of beach access for the disabled and aging. We asked for an appointment with her to discuss these issues and received a reply which simply patted us on the back, with the invitation of a meeting being considered.

This is typical of the reason why we are so sceptical when it comes to government strategies that make great promises, yet never deliver. Ministers should be screaming out for help from organisations like ourselves, yet treat us with disdain, verging on contempt.

Our Disability Tourism program for Collaroy Beach has a master plan and an approved budget up to \$3.65 Million dollars. The Central Coast program has identified the two economically ailing strip shopping centres of Budgewoi and Toukley for improved disability access to all amenities for a safe and happy holiday destination. The Northern Lakes Disability Tourism Precinct Committee, with representatives from most peak disability organisations in the region, is currently carrying out audits on private homes, shops, clubs and disability infrastructure and services available. Central Coast Tourism has identified the need for Disability Tourism in their Destination Management Plan for Tourism 2010 to 2013.

We raise the issue of all levels of government being involved in the everyday issues of the disabled, but our experiences are depressing. On receiving a copy of the NSW Sport and Recreation Industry Strategic Directions – a five year plan – Discussion paper from the General Manager Darryl Clout in 2007, I was amazed to find that Disabled Sport had been omitted or forgotten. When raising this issue directly with Mr. Clout both over the phone and in writing, the best I got as a reply was "Point Taken".

Another case for the MLAK key system when raised with my local council Wyong Shire was a reply from a councillor Doug Vincent that council officers were told it was reverse discrimination to lock out able bodied people from public toilets after hours and allow the disabled entry using the MLAK key. With further investigation to the source of this comment it was found that the Chairperson of the Access Committee for Standards Australia, Murray Mountain was the offender and when council was presented with a contrary reply from the Human Rights Commission, it was soon decided to retro fit some 14 existing public toilet blocks with the system. Mr. Mountain is now under investigation after the DSA raised the issue with Standards Australia.

Further to Wyong council (Local government's) inability to understand the requirements of the disabled, is the construction of a purpose built disability toilet block in the township of Budgewoi. After a fan fair to celebrate the opening of the public toilet block it was found to have a series of inadequacies which were potentially life threatening. Ramps leading to and from the shops opposite were too steep and tended to toss the disabled out of their chairs when bottoming out.

4.

Several raised concrete ledges were dangerous and the toilet itself was lacking to be truly described as disability friendly. Concrete paths leading to the facility were too narrow for manoeuvring electric chairs and scooters with bollards being placed in the path of oncoming wheelchairs. A meeting was arranged weeks after the opening with council engineers who agreed it was not good enough.

As an initial reply to the Productivity Commission inquiry from the Disabled Surfers Association of Australia Inc., it is imperative that this inquiry comes up with the right answers. Both the NDS and NDIS schemes are a logistical nightmare and unlikely to come to fruition on economic grounds alone. We support the intentions of both schemes in general, yet believe there is a need to promote both, after an extensive advertising program on communities accepting the disabled as equals and therefore having full support of the Australian community.

Unfortunately your terms of reference does not allow organisations or individuals to directly report our concerns to a panel and as a voluntary organisation it is impossible for us to have all the answers or time to comprehend the entire document. Yet again, we are very sceptical especially if history goes the way as many other strategies and ministers appointed for the specific portfolio of Disabilities and Aging, show no interest in their clients and service providers.

Simply put, we need to go back to basics and follow the KISS principle, listen to the grass roots and react upon their concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Gary Blaschke OAM

D.S.A.A. Founder and National President

PO Box 345, The Entrance NSW 2161